

More than a year after the tragic and deadly Deepwater Horizon explosion, thankfully most of the visible oil has been removed from our beaches and tourists have returned to the Alabama Gulf Coast in record numbers. For all the progress that has been made, there is still a lot to be done to fully heal the scars and to ensure that future threats to our region will be minimized.

One major step forward was taken last week as lawmakers from the five Gulf Coast states joined together to introduce The RESTORE Act. The legislation has already garnered the support of 25 members of Congress, including the entire Alabama and Mississippi congressional delegations.

In short, the RESTORE Act, if passed into law, would ensure that Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas each receive an equitable share of any fine monies levied against those responsible for the catastrophic 2010 Gulf oil spill. Currently, BP and the other responsible parties are in the midst of a civil lawsuit filed by the Department of Justice to determine Clean Water Act (CWA) fines. The lawsuit asks the court for civil penalties under the CWA and to declare eight of the defendants liable without limitation under the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 for all removal costs and damages caused by the oil spill.

The RESTORE Act would direct 80 percent of the total fines collected to the location where the injury occurred, the five Gulf Coast states - including Alabama - for environmental and economic restoration purposes.

Each state was affected in different ways from last year's spill. Some states suffered more environmental damage, while others, including Alabama, endured considerable economic impact as well. Alabama's beaches, in particular, lost at least one million tourists during the 2010 season. The absence of tourist revenues struck just as our area was trying to recover from the prolonged recession.

Bringing the majority of the Clean Water Act fines assessed against, BP, Transocean, Halliburton and others back to the Gulf Coast is only fitting as our region was uniquely affected by the worst environmental disaster in U.S. history. As those of us who live along the Gulf of Mexico already know, our backyard is vital to the economic health of the nation. It is home to 90 percent of America's offshore oil and gas production, 33 percent of the country's seafood and is a major tourist destination.

In fact, if the U.S. Gulf Coast states were considered as an individual country, they would rank seventh globally in gross domestic product (GDP), at over \$2.5 trillion annually. It is therefore critical that the Gulf States – which bear so much risk – be given access to the majority of the Clean Water Act fines collected.

Of the total amount of CWA fine monies going to the Gulf region, The RESTORE Act would divide 35 percent equally among the Gulf States for economic and ecological recovery. An additional 30 percent of CWA fines would be set aside to develop and implement a comprehensive restoration plan with all five states equally represented in the oversight. Another 30 percent of the CWA fine money would be disbursed among the five states according to a formula based on impact. Finally, five percent of the remaining funds would go toward establishing a long-term science and fisheries endowment to safeguard our Gulf Coast ecosystem and to study the long-term impact of the spill.

I am personally pleased to have assisted in writing this legislation and look forward to working with my fellow Gulf Coast lawmakers to push for its passage this fall.

### **Veterans Cemetery Groundbreaking:**

Last Friday, I was honored to participate in the official groundbreaking of the long-awaited Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Saluda Hill, overlooking Mobile Bay near Spanish Fort.

To say the groundbreaking was long-awaited really doesn't do it justice. For some 49 years, South Alabama veterans have been without a final resting place dedicated to their service. The Mobile National Cemetery, which was established at the end of the Civil War, was closed to interments in 1962. For approximately half a century, local veterans who wanted to be buried in a Veterans cemetery have had to look to north Alabama or locations out of state.

In 2009, building on the decades of groundwork laid by Congressman Sonny Callahan and local veterans, we were finally able to secure a suitable location and obtain federal and state approval for a new veteran cemetery in our community. The 103 acre facility will be Alabama's

first state-run Veterans cemetery, maintaining the same high standards as America's national Veterans cemeteries. When completed, it will be a stirring and fitting memorial to those who sacrificed for our freedom.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.

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